Daryl Collins

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Daryl Collins

A huddled, small, frail figure was in the corner. There was blood on his hands. He looked along the ground, hoping to whatever god existed that it was a nightmare. But, he thought to himself, you never know you're in a dream. He accepted what had happened immediately. He froze his gaze, too, glad it hadn't reached it's destination. Glad that his gaze wouldn't fall again on the bodies. He looked at the slash across his hands and thought that he didn't deserve this.

But, then, who did?

Daryl Collins pulled himself out of the gutter. The rain was soaking through his impromptu bandage, made from what was left of his torn up shirt. He splashed onto the street, looked both ways. He was trying to look as normal as possible. He may not have been wearing a shirt, but in the slums there were some weird people. Good. He could blend in by standing out. He turned right and headed towards where he thought his home was.

Not that it's that much of a home, really, he thought to himself. He reflected on how he had gotten onto this street, with blood dripping into the puddles of water all along the street, birthing crimson clouds into each puddle.

There had been the scream, first. The scream of a little girl. He had turned the other way, ready to turn the other cheek, literally. Murder, robberyâ€¦ These were common occurrences. The slums of the planet Harmony weren't the nicest of places. But there was something that told him to go to the girl's aid. Intuition, some might have called it. Collins did a one-eighty, spinning on his heel. He noticed that a light drizzle had started to pitter-patter down from the sulking clouds the second before he turned the corner.

He had turned the corner, and there the girl was, as expected. But what Collins hadn't expected was the baby. Or the knife. The girl had been stabbed already, her cry had been from the wound. She was dead, and there was nothing he could do. It wasn't the first time he had seen a body. The slums were cruel to those who were week, and those who were helpless. He averted his gaze from the corpse, and hoped someone would bury her. Then, he let his anger boil. There was the baby to save, and he could try to save her. But his real objective, now ,wasn't to save the baby. It was to kill the man.

A blade slashed through the air, screaming in glee. It struck his hands, cutting his skin as if it were a hot knife through butter. And it was a hot knife. But Collins was not butter. The blade cut a nasty design into his hands, held in a praying position. He was on his knees, a pious child. A pious child that would no longer believe. He screamed. With his peripheral vision, he saw a man that could save him. This man averted his eyes and turned the other cheek. He walked past the bodies behind Collins and pretended everything was fine. The blood poured out of his hands, at odds with the bright and cheery sun in the sky. Then there was a whisper, and the man with the knife turned and walked away. Collins picked up a rock and heaved it toward the man. It hit the knife the man held loosely at his side, birthing a deep scratch onto it's side.

And there was the knife. The same scratch Collins had pondered so long. How could the rock have scratched the knife when thrown from aching arms such as his? Bu that was then. This was now.

Readying himself, Collins charged at the man, eager to save the baby, eager to avenge the parentless little girl. He made contact, pulling the man to the ground. The man didn't even see it coming. Collins brought his knee up into the man's groin. Collins wasn't afraid to use what some would call cheap shots. The man dropped his knife and clutched his groin. Collins punched him in the face, in a rage. He pulled back the fist and repeatedâ€¦ once, twice, three times. The man was out cold. His blood was on Collins hands. Collins got up and kicked him in the side. He picked up the knife that had left two bodies on the asphalt of the alleyway where his parents had been murdered, the knife that had scarred his hands. He plunged it into the man's arm and pulled it out. Technically, the man wasn't dead. This man had killed countless people, and was not above the death penalty. But Collins wouldn't kill him.

Collins wouldn't kill him, but an infection would. And so Collins tucked the knife into the waist of his jeans, and started to run toward the nearest shelter. He crossed an orphanage, _Saint Cabrera_, and dropped off the baby. He ignored the clichÃ© in finding a baby on the doorstep.

He ran farther away, until he could run no more, and sat down on a curb. He was bleeding from his side, and he hadn't even noticed. He tore up his shirt and pressed it to the wound. He then walked across the street and into a covered alleyway where he would be shielded from the rain. He stumbled, and fell over into a gutter on the opposite side of the small alleyway. He hit the gutter, and decided he would only be truly safe from the freezing rain and biting cold at his home.

Right before he got up to walk away, he muttered to himself, "A hell of a sweet sixteen birthday party."

He felt no regret, and no remorse.

Collins rolled off the couch, and groaned. He looked around. He was on the floor of the apartment he shared with two other teenagers. He also had a knife in his pants and a shirt stuck to his side.

"Oh hell," he said as he remembered the night before, his sixteenth birthday. There was no party, but he grinned as he remembered the best gift he had ever gotten.

"Does it make me a sick person to think of avenging my parents through coldly murdering a serial killer a birthday gift?" He asked himself. After a brief silence, he assumed the answer was no.

He pulled himself up and sat with his back against the couch. He tried to pull the shirt off his wound, but it was stuck to it from dried blood. He pulled the knife out of his pants and cut parts of the shirt of until all that was left were the pieces stuck to his wound. _This might need a doctor,_ he thought to himself.

Just then, one of his roommates galloped through the door, creating an earthquake. She was Sally, the green-haired, blue eyed seventeen year old that had owned this house and offered a room for Collins. She had a kind, sometimes gullible heart, an upbeat attitude, and a fountain of optimism. In these slums, she was a one-of-a-kind. She put her face right up to Collins and yelled, "Happy belated birthday, Daryl!"

Collins jumped up and fright, yelled in pain, then sank back onto the couch. Suddenly, Sally put on her concerned face and looked for the problem. She saw Collins side and whispered, "Shit."

"What did you do for your birthday, Daryl? Even I can't party so much that I bleed."

"Can it. We both know I didn't have any kind of party. Besides, I need a doctor. Can you get me to the local clinic, please?" Collins said, exasperated.

"Alright. But next time, come to the surprise party we invited you to?" She said as she helped him to the door, then down the steps. "Jack and I were so sad when you didn't show."

She helped him throughout the two mile walk through smoky urban slums. The sun didn't shine in this part of town. They got no weird looks during the walk. This was a normal occurrence, except usually, the wounded person would die before help could come.

They arrived at the clinic, and there was no one there but the doctor, skimming his emails in boredom. He didn't make much of a living in this part of the town, mostly because no one seemed to survive long enough to get to the clinic. It was a good thing he was government funded and not a private business. If he had owned his own clinic, he would have been like everyone else in this town long ago.

When he saw Collins, he cocked an eyebrow at his wound.

"What did you do? Get yourself stabbed?"

"Yes."

"Oh damn it. Get over here. We need to disinfect that and stitch it up before it becomes a problem."

The doctor pulled Collins onto a stool and tore off the cloth. Collins cried in pain. Sally closed her eyes. The doctor poured alcohol on the stab wound. He then crouched down to take a closer look.

"Good news. It didn't go deep at all."

He stitched it up, and wrapped a bandage around it. He then shooed Collins and Sally away with a smirk, so that he could treat all his other patients. Collins didn't bother to insult him about not having any patients to begin with.

Sally helped Collins back home, and then he fell asleep on the couch in his tiny, bare room once more.

The following day was a Monday. This meant that Collins had to go to school. He, like most other children, went to school because for seven hours a day he was moderately safe from the slums he inhabited the other seventeen hours of the day. He aced all his classes, but so did everybody else. The reason Collins was different, though, was because he didn't bribe the teachers whenever he saw the report card he was supposed to give to his dead parents. _Funny how no one has ever realized that I'm an orphan_, Collins thought.

For the next to days, Collins was cheerful, for once. Eating with Sally at lunch, she noticed his usually somber tone had changed. He was cheerful because he was happy, a rare occurrence. He had, in a way, avenged his family and saved a life. He had taken a life, too, but it balanced out in the end.

But, like all feelings, the cheerfulness faded away. And then, it was back to normal.

2

Collins took the certificate and walked out of the dingy school's office. There was no trumpet, there was no fanfare. He had just graduated from high school. He trudged through the streets back to his apartment. He had been seventeen for a few months now. He had graduated a year early simply because he excelled in all his classes.

He arrived at the apartment, now empty. Jack, his eldest friend at , had gone of the to the military, in a rage. Collins remembered Jack leaving.

Christ, Daryl. Jesus Christ. She's practically dead now. She was like a sister and nowâ€¦ stuck in a cry tube, waiting for the cure. She's been stabbed so deeply, we can't afford anything but a cryo tube or a funeral. We can't afford the surgery. We need the money to bring Sally back. So I have to go. It pays better than this job I have now, for sure.

Sally had been stabbed, just like Collins parents. The knife had

severed her spine. Only the best UNSC doctors could help her, but there was no money to bring her back. So Jack had left. He had promised, like they all do, to write back every week. He had stopped writing a month ago. Collins footsteps echoed a little in the empty apartment. He was alone, once more. He couldn't afford a college. The money the roommates had saved up for Collins and Sally to make it to college was now being saved for Sally to get out of a tube. Collins had nowhere to go. The only thing he could do now was join the military and receive a free education, or stay in the beautiful slums indefinitely. But joining the military would go against Collins biggest rule. His rule was simple. Survive.

_But what have I got to survive for? _

It took a few months after his insignificant graduation before he made his decision. He decided that fighting the Covenant was preferable to fighting himself.

Where as Jack had gone into the army for quick money, Collins was going to school. Military academies were free, and he needed money from the rank he could only achieve through military schooling. He needed it the money. He thought it funny how everything, even saving lives worth saving, revolved around money. And how some were condemned from birth because of this. Collins may have been condemned, but he would escape. And the military was his best option.

The first few weeks were hell. Basic Cadet Training was it's formal name, but everyone had taken to calling it The Bomb. The reason behind this nickname was simple. If a bomb explodes, it destroys everything you have become. Basic Cadet Training did the same.

Collins encouraged his civilian friends to imagine having 500 push-ups a day. Six-hundred sit-ups. One-hundred flutter kicks. It tore apart your body first; melded it into something stronger, tougher. Then? Then it destroyed your mind and personality. You went from a cheerful, optimistic person to a military robot. Or from a cynically humorous person to a military robot. Eventually, it broke you and made you into what it wanted, what it needed. It exploded, consumed you, and patched together a new Frankenstein from the pieces of your life. But Collins new it wasn't to blame. The military needed the strongest, the fastest, and the most willing to obey people it could get. The military created an order necessary to create chaos.

Collins hated it, but he knew it was necessary. If he could persevere, he would achieve his dream, something few people did in their lifetime- let alone their twenties.

But soon The Bomb was over. His life had been burned and grown anew. He was now part of the fighting UNSC. The training had almost instilled a sense of patriotism in him, too. But he knew better than to love his nation. _Why love a nation that has done nothing to me but ruined the life I never had a chance to get? _he thought often.

The Bomb was over and now came the academics. He needed to learn things to get the big bucks. _Education_, he thought, _is probably the only thing humanity has ever gotten right. _

The days went slow. Military school had no wild parties. A good time was a movie in the dorms. But Collins didn't go for a good time. He wouldn't have gone to any parties or wild events at another, normal university. Collins was here for the opportunities. He planned to ace his classes. And he did, too.

He had been working hard when the order was passed down to him. It sounded fine; like many other orders. Meet me in conference room two-four-oh for a meeting with your officers. We will be discussing your academic advancement and prowess, attempting to help you overcome small problems you may be havingâ€¦ Stuff he'd heard before. Half way through each of the two school years he had been here, he had gone through a rough and long conference superiors about what he was doing wrong. That was the thing about the military. This is what you are doing wrong, son. They never told you what you were doing right. But that wasn't their style, and positive reinforcement didn't really work as well as some parents were led to believe. The military understood this.

At exactly 0900 hours, he walked down the long hallway filled with small offices a medium sized conference rooms. The smell of old coffee permeated the air, no doubt from some officer's Starbucks left on his desk. He relished the hallway as he passed down it's unending white, focusing on postponing his conference for as long as possible to get to the conference on time, at 0905 hours. He didn't want to be late, but he really wanted to be late.

Collins arrived in the room and was surprised not to see his usual commanding officer. He glanced at the shoulders of these two men quickly to establish rank and know how to greet them. Seeing their shoulders, he went rigid with his hand at a perfect, crispy salute.

_ONI Spooks? Shady as always. What could they possibly want with dear, little old me? _Collins thought to himself.

_**3**_

Collins stumbled out of the conference room, holding a data pad. He was bewildered; any passerby could have said as much. He quickly regained his composure and snapped back to normal. It wouldn't do to look suspicious after ONI had specifically told him not to be suspicious.

_It's funny how ONI, part of the Navy, doesn't want anyone else in the military to know what they're doing, _he thought to himself.

He snapped a salute to each officer he passed, making sure to do it the same way he always did. Apathetically. He marched back to his small dorm room and was thankful that he was alone. His roommates were out, most likely in classes. He bumped into his bed, destroying the hospital corners he had worked so hard to create last night before falling asleep, and collapsed into his desk's chair. For a second he spun in the chair, rejoicing in the fact that it could spin, then he let himself get back to work. He stared down at the data pad he clutched in his hands, a death grip. He was staring at an opportunity to make real cash, and get a seemingly permanent job at that. He tapped the only icon on the screen of the data pad, opening an icon to a document with a extremely long scroll bar.

"Damn. This might take awhile to read."

Collins read through the document, slowly, carefully. He made sure to be cautious because ONI Section Zero had a reputation, simply because of it's secretive workings. No one knew what happened in there.

When his eyes had finally slid to a stop at the bottom of the document, he let out a laugh. The job was more than suspicious alright, it was downright ridiculous. But inside, Collins knew that the mission may have been ridiculous, but it did make sense. ONI was meant to be the all-seeing eye. It was time for Collins to lend his sight, perception, and observation skills.

Collins looked to the bottom of the page for any small print, and there was nothing other than the expected words, "You will not be able to undo your choice if you commit to these actions. This is also a once in a lifetime opportunity."

Collins took the plastic pen clipped to the top of the data pad and signed his name at the bottom. He understood that not only was this a good paying mission, it could have other benefits too. This was Section Zero of ONI. Who knew what kind of info he could weasel out of this. Knowledge is power. He saved the document with the signature on it, then clicked the SEND button. The document was on it's way. Collins now had to wait until ONI once again contacted him and actually told him what his mission would be. So far, they had only told him the danger level and paycheck. And the paycheck surely canceled out the danger.

It was a long wait before ONI came back for Collins. And when they did, they made sure no one but Collins knew. After a three month wait, Collins had once again been absorbed into the military life. He had almost forgotten about ONI. Then suddenly, there they were again. But this time they didn't just disappear. This time, they disappeared with Collins. After giving him the briefing for his first mission with ONI, they created an official document with total lies about why Collins was leaving.

Collins was leaving because ONI needed him. But the more public official records clearly stated that Collins had been caught bootlegging various alcoholic beverages across campus, as well as possessing a data pad for three months without telling anyone. To smite him, the military demoted him from Lance Corporal to Private and send him straight into the war, just like that. There was no mercy in the military. No one questioned the orders. Collins had multiple reasons for this, but he didn't like to think about it. It wasted too much time, and his time was becoming fleeting.

And just like that, a prodigy Lance Corporal rising from an academy had been caught bootlegging and demoted to Private to be sent out into the field. Suddenly, Collins had had his reputation destroyed.

He'd been out on the field for three days with what was left of his group, stranded. Originally, the mission had been to oversee and investigate this new squad by playing army man. He had been falsely demoted once again, this time from Staff Sergeant , back down to Private. Not that Collins cared. His payday made it worthwhile.

But this hadn't been in the briefing.

He was lying against the cold hard cement of an unfinished bedroom.. Private Collins, now known by friends as the perpetual private, was with two other men. Private First Class Shelberrn and Private Kadas were all that was left of their scout group of ten. The rest were dead. They had been sent out with two warthogs to scout the innermost part of the city Collins had grown up in. The Covenant had obviously heard that there was something of minor significance here. A small strike force had been sent to check out local museums and mop up civilians. They were wasting their time on a false lead. ONI had done their job with a false broadcast the Covenant had picked up on. And Collins was glad, too. Sally was still here. Even with his new paycheck, he couldn't afford to get her out of cryo sleep yet. He would be able to soon, thought, so he needed to save Harmony. The Covenant had gone to far this time. Now it was personal.

Maybe ONI had put him here on purpose. To see how he reacted in emotional situations like this. He was a useful agent. But they probably hadn't realized how little control they had over him while he was in the field. He had been forced onto the scout team that had been given a an M12 Warthog and an M831 TT Warthog. The first had a turret, the second had extra seats. The turret went in first, even though it was less heavily armed. Collins rode shotgun in this with a Jackhammer rocket launcher. Shelberrn drove. Kadas was on turret. Everyone else on the team was on the more lethal passenger hog. Each passenger on the second hog had a Jackhammer rocket launcher, with plenty of ammo.

Both Warthogs had been driving throughout the inner streets of the city blasting covenant infantry to hell. There had been no vehicles, because the streets were only just big enough for the Warthog to fit through. It took some skilled driving to drive in these streets, and that was probably why Collins had been on the surviving hog. Shelberrn was known as the conceited jerk, full of himself, but he could drive hogs like no other. He almost had a right to brag. The driver of the second hog wasn't as skilled. They had been driving side by side in the only street wide enough for them to, the main street. It had five lanes with nothing in between and gave them plenty of comfortable driving space. The Covenant hadn't sent in any vehicles, so it was is to gun down enemies.

Neither warthog had seen the fuel rod plasma coming for them. Shelberrn spun the wheel, eyes closed, and act of defiance against death. He got lucky. The bullet barely missed Kadas' leg, then went down to blow the back right wheel of the passenger hog to bits. The second hog started swerving out of control, the back left half of the warthog practically gone. The initial explosion had instantaneously killed two of the four passengers. Almost immediately, with the dangerous hog weakened, a hail of plasma bullets descended onto the second hog. Everyone died.

But Collins' hog hadn't been ignored. A second fuel rod bullet crashed behind them, sending the warthog upwards, the back flipping over the front. Collins waited for death to come and apologize for missing the first time around, and then the hog hit the ground.

A third bullet hit, farther away this time, as the warthog landed upside down. Collins was just small enough that his head didn't touch the ground. There was about two inches between him and the asphalt.

He was bleeding. He had survived, but he was bleeding a lot. Then the third bullet came to finish what the first two had started and shot hog sideways into the window of a display shop. The warthog had done a 360 and ended up on facedown on the floor of the shop. He, Shelberrn, and Kadas crawled out of warthog. Kadas collapsed onto the floor, unconscious after crawling out. He had taken the worst damage, having the most open position on the hog.

"Sherrman! Take Kadas upstairs!" Collins pointed to a small staircase that led somewhere upstairs, "I need to get the Jackhammer rocket launcher back!"

Collins limped over to the broken, body of a once jubilant warthog and pulled from it's bowels the Jackhammer launcher and two cases of ammo. He stumbled away from the corpse of the warthog, the cases of ammo in one hand, the rocket launcher in the other. As he was stumbling away, a the last of the fuel rod gun's clip emptied into the warthog. The Covenant was baing careless by assuming that they were dead or dying in the hog, but Collins wasn't one to complain. The explosion of the hog tore through many of the clothes inside the shop. Flaming bits of panties and bras flew everywhere. Collins suppressed a grin at the ridiculousness of his situation and climbed upstairs. He found Sherrman feeling Kadas' wrists for a pulse.

"What do we have?"

"We have a pulse."

Sherrman settled back, and curled into a ball. He sobbed into his arms. He had come from a rich family. He said his father forced him into the military. Whatever his reason for joining up, he hadn't not been ready for the horror of war.

Collins mouth was a grim slit across his face. Blood was trailing behind him. He must have left a trail, but his only hope was that the Covenant troops wouldn't notice it in their arrogance. He reached for his emergency radio to call for help, then thought better of it. No one would be able to help them now, and the signal could be intercepted. Their only way out was to fight out.

"Sherrman, we leave when Kadas wakes up."

"It might be awhile, man. I think he has a concussion, his head is bleeding so bad. He needs help, help we can't giveâ€¦ manâ€¦ Damn it! How did we get here! It was going so smoothly!" Sherrman said, his words fading back into sobs.

"Sherrman, if he does have a concussion our best choice is to get moving now." Collins didn't notice that he was commanding a superior officer, but it didn't matter. Collins was from the wild streets, and he knew how to survive.

Collins crept up to the window and pulled the hot pink blinds to either side. He peeked out the window at the Covenant forces. The crowded the streets. They had made an assembly line. The line led to the museum, where random artifacts no longer of any value were tossed into the line, to be transferred into a covenant Phantom. The Phantom most likely had someone to inspect the objects, but it sure made it hard to escape.

"There must be something useful in this bedroom, somewhereâ€¦" Collins said to himself.

_**4**_

It took Collins awhile to notice the door. The door was blocked by a dresser. Obviously this building was old, probably an old townhouse converted into two shops. With Sherrman's help, he managed to heave the ornate piece of mahogany furniture onto it's side, out of the way. He pulled the door open and found another, identically shaped and sized bedroom. Except, this side was different. This side was a shop for small antiques.

Collins took some time to contemplate the floor plan. When he had lived in the slums near the main street years back, he hadn't spent much time in the shops. But he had learned that when the colony had first been started, the city Collins was in had been the third created. It had started out with two rows of simple house, built more for survival than living. Eventually the colony had prospered and the city had grown up around the houses, and they had been kept- but still refurbished- because of historical value. Then, with the houses becoming the main street of the town, trade needed a place to lodge. So the house were picked of one by one until each of them had become something other than living spaces. A few had been split apart into multiple stores. The largest had been changed into three separate stores.

Then he remembered the most important thing about the floor plan.

The balconies.

When the city had started to become industrialized, For a few decades, a man had bought up all the house on each row. He had been loaded, and wanted to wait until the houses sheer antique value shot up to sell them, and make a profit. To encourage buyers to buy them, he had given each one a balcony on the back of the buildings. The houses were squeezed together like townhouses; this made the space between each balcony not much more than ten feet. Originally, it had been a scenic view looking over the fields that had quickly been urbanized. Looking out the balcony, Collins saw the back of another building roughly two feet away. The balconies simply shot out over a small, dark alleyway. But if Collins, Sherrman, and Kadas could find a way to connect the balconies, they could cross between them like on some of the complex training courses Collins had endured during his time at the academy. Of course, Kadas would have to regain consciousness. That was the major problem, along with the lack of any large ladders. And there was a patrol directly under the balconies, Collins noticed when he silently stepped out for a few minutes to observe the surroundings. He had two choices. Either take out the patrol with the Jackhammer, which would mean death by reinforcements, or he could use stealth to cross the balconies.

Collins was naturally a stealthy person. And an agile person. Alone, he could have made his way back, but he had baggage. He did not know what to do with Sherrman and Kadas.

We're not Spartans, he thought, _so we can't just blow our way out of here. And we can't just sneak away with that patrol under us. There has to be something to do!_

Collins realized that there might be a third choice.

He peeked over the balcony as the patrol passed under, silently, and hoped it wouldn't see him observing it. He got lucky, once again. It didn't see him. The patrol was obviously not made for this kind of thing. The patrol was in the alleyway, and consisted of two grunts and a jackal. Originally, he had mistaken the jackal for an elite somehow, but now he knew the odds weren't as terrible. He looked at the dull gray wall of the building two fee away from the edged of the cement balcony he was standing on. If he could hold himself between the walls with his hands and feet, and then drop down 14 feet onto the jackal below as he passed, he could kill it. Landing on the jackal would break the impact of the fall, and maybe even kill it. From there, he could kill the now disorganized and panicking grunts with his knife before they knew what happened. It would have to be done quickly, before anyone could pull a plasma pistol on him.

And it would be Collins doing it. Sherrman was panicking, and Kadas was out cold. Collins was the chosen one, or so it seemed to him. Collins poked his head back into the bedroom to tell Sherrman his plan. The plan was simple. Collins would swiftly kill the patrol, hopefully without any damage. Then, Sherrman would gently drop Kadas down. This was the hard part. Collins would have to catch 140 pounds of Kadas, the only person in his current squad who was as smaller than him. Collins would probably have to fall backwards onto the pile of bodies to cushion their falls. It was crazy, but it was the best they could do. Than, hopefully, Sherrman would be able to drop down onto the pile of alien corpses.

Who knew how useful something as simple as a corpse could be? Collins thought. It was a gruesome idea, something a Spartan might do without his shields, but they were trapped. Luckily, the cat didn't know they were alive back in the old mouse hole. That was their only advantage.

Collins, for a second, realized they could just walk back downstairs and go out through the back door of the building's ground floor. But then he countered this thought with the fact that Covenant forces could easily see him downstairs, since the smoke of the warthog's death had probably faded away by now.

He glanced at his watch, and was sure the smoke had faded. Time had flown, and they had been in the upstairs bedroom for almost three hours now. He quickly knelt down and felt Kadas' pulse, just to make sure he was still alive. He was, and his pulse was actually stronger.

"Good newsâ€¦ Kadas is getting better, slowlyâ€¦"

And on that note, Collins proceeded to enact his plan.

He walked out onto the balcony, and waited about two minutes. He hoisted himself between the alley wall and the balcony railing. The patrol passed under him, the jackal in the back, and he dropped.

Multiple things happened very quickly. First, a plasma shot fired at him while he was falling, hitting his right shoulder. He screamed. And then, while he was screaming, he took out the knife that had

killed his parents and put it facing down in front of him. The jackal saw him, but was to late to react. The knife went into it's back, creating a harmonious symphony of squelches and snapping sounds. Then the pain Collins had briefly forgotten came back with a vengeance.

"Damn that hurts!" He whimpered, holding himself back from another scream. If he was lucky enough that the Covenant enemies didn't hear his first scream, he wouldn't be lucky again. He quickly regained his wits, ignoring the pain to his best ability, and took in his surroundings. He somersaulted to the right and swept a grunts legs out from underneath him, dropping the plasma pistol it was holding. The grunt didn't have time to engage the fail safe, so Collins picked it up, pressed what he hoped was the trigger, and fired a shot into it's face. There was a strong smell of barbecue. He then laid down on the asphalt as another plasma pistol shot, this time uncharged, flew over where his chest had been seconds ago. He launched onto his feet and tackled the grunt, sending it to the ground. He punched it in the face, hurting his hand. Then he pulled of it's methane breather, and kicked it, sending it flying. He watched as it clutched at it's throat, then fell over dead. He had won, but he was damn sure that shoulder would scar. Then, he pulled the knife that had killed his parents out of the jackals back.

A few weeks later, he stumbled out of the bathroom. His shoulder had healed, with a lot of pain-killers, and he was back to normal. He looked once again at his shoulder, lifting his collar up, to see the big scar still there. Many people had been lost on Harmony, and he had paid only a fraction of the price others had. _As unlucky as I am_, he thought, _I'm extremely lucky_.

Then he stumbled right back into the bathroom, and locked himself into his stall. He realized that everyone needed some time to wallow in self-pity, and he hadn't given himself the luxury yet. He started thinking, and then very quickly started sobbing. He hadn't cried much when his parents had died. He had forced himself back to save some face from the cruel world. He hadn't cried when Kadas had died, a good friend after a short battlefield experience. Kadas had died painfully, awake. Collins and Sherrman had assumed he'd had a concussion. He did have a concussion, along with internal bleeding, but they hadn't noticed the mass of energy burns at the base of his spine. When they pulled him into the Med Bay of their ship, Kadas was told, in his semi-conscious state of mind, that he would never walk again. And then, almost right after, they had seen Harmony, Collins' home, glassed. With Sally on it, too. Sally was dead. Kadas was dead. Jack hadn't talked or written or anything to Collins since his second month in the Academy. Then Collins went on remembering, much to his pain.

There was Kadas' death. He was supposed to recover. But as they were about to enter slip space, a Covenant plasma burst hit Kadas' side of the ship, the Med Bay. He had gotten his own special room in the extra-small special care ward aboard the ship. The plasma rocked the ship, and tore a small hole. The plasma had melted a hole through the wall about the size of a window. Unable to get away with the short amount of time he had to run, on account of his legs, he was sucked into space. Collins hadn't seen his body yet.

And then, there was Sherrman. Sherrman, the man who had thrown himself in front of Kadas while everyone had been stumbling back to

the base. He had taken seven plasma burns, then crawled back up in the name of courage to kill two of the four grunts that had confronted them. He had saved Kadas, and indirectly saved Collins. He had been considered for the medal of honor. Then, Kadas had died, leaving his best friend since Sophomore year of high school all alone. Sherrman had obtained severe symtoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The last thing he whispered before pulling the trigger in the mess hall before pulling the trigger was this: "I saw his body out there. Floating in space. And no one, Collins, was trying to help him."

Collins got no awards from this whole experience. Except maybe the pills he had been given to make sure he didn't get PTSD. ONI still needed his help, so they made sure he stayed under the radar. He got no recognition. Collins thought back to two years ago, when he'd let ONI sucker him into this. He had been two years younger then, but now he had grown forty years older. And now, after all this, they were sending him right back into it. All he had to do was wait for it all to hit the fan in his newly assigned squad, C Squad it was called. Soon his boots would settle on the titanium A plating of the _Leviathan's_ hangar, and he would once again start anew. But that was how ONI section zero dealt with their employees, like Collins. No mercy.

And now ONI was sending him right off to a new squad. Another suspicious and dysfunctional squad. That was his job. To investigate and play along with suspicious and dysfunctional squads throughout the Navy. It had sounded to simple when he had been in the Academy. ONI hadn't told him that he would get attached to teammates. Or that they would all die. They had taken a child and ruined the ruins of his life.

As a cherry on top, there was sally. He had watched the plasma bullets hit the city, and he knew that suddenly he had no more purpose. Sally was dead, burned alive in a layer of ice. Irony, they called it.

And he sobbed. He gave into the tantalizing self-pity he had once shunned.

And he cried, rivulets of tears, the blood on the asphalt, the burns along his arm, the images in his head, the blood on his hands. The pen in his hand, the smile long gone, the corpses next to his coffin. He cried, hoping that his tears would carry it all away. But they didn't.

He cried.

End
file.